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ABSTRACT

A Faculty of Education dramatically restructured its preservice teacher education program by putting experience first through introducing an extended fall-term practicum of 14 weeks. Focus group interviews were conducted with elementary and secondary teachers and administrators over a 3-year period, prior to and twice during the controversial restructuring. There were 3 sets of focus groups and interviews with 31 teachers. As an evaluation study, the focus groups presented mixed data: praising the thrust of the program and protesting the demands placed on field personnel. As a qualitative research study, predictive validity for focus groups in educational contexts is introduced and substantiated. As a study of collaboration between field practitioners and teacher educators, it suggests a need for thinking about the limits to collaboration that may arise from differing interpretations of professional responsibility. (Contains 44 references.) (SLD)

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Two Communities of Practice: Learning the Limits to Collaboration

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Abstract

A Faculty of Education dramatically restructured its preservice teacher education program by putting experience first and introducing an extended fall-term practicum of 14 weeks. Focus group interviews were conducted with elementary and secondary teachers and administrators over a 3-year period, prior to and twice during the controversial restructuring. As an evaluation study, the focus groups presented mixed data: praising the thrust of the program and protesting the demands placed on field personnel. As a qualitative research study, predictive validity for focus groups in educational contexts is introduced and substantiated. As a study of collaboration between field practitioners and teacher educators, it suggests a need for thinking about the limits to collaboration that may arise from differing interpretations of professional responsibility.

Can we afford not to take the risk that we might educate better teachers?

Purpose

To dramatically restructure a preservice teacher education program is a bold enterprise. When the enterprise requires a significantly extended practicum, the participation of field practioners in cooperating schools is critical and essential, and the demands placed on them are significantly increased. What follows is a story about two cultures meeting over a common interest. How differences are framed and resolved, or not, leads to understanding that there are significant limits to collaboration that stem from the respective contexts of school and university and the ways in which professional responsibilities are interpreted in these two communities.

A Faculty of Education set out to reform its preservice teacher education program by putting experience first (Upitis, 1999). During this controversial restructuring, a series of loosely coupled evaluation studies was conducted. This paper reports on focus group interviews with the field, prior to and twice during restructuring, develops the notion of predictive validity for educational, qualitative research using focus groups, and explores the perspectives of the two communities of practice that collaborate in teacher education. As an evaluation study, it reports the results from three sets of data collected over a three year period: focus group data collected from elementary and secondary teachers and administrators during the development of the new program, focus group data collected from teachers and administrators a year later after the 14-week extended practicum was completed in the pilot year of the program, and focus group data collected from field personnel after the extended practicum in the first year of full implementation of the new program. As a qualitative research study, it introduces and substantiates predictive validity for focus groups in educational contexts. This is achieved by comparing the data of the first consultative focus

groups and two subsequent evaluative groups with close attention to congruences and divergences in the issues raised and themes developed each year. As a study of collaboration between field practitioners and teacher educators, it suggests a need for thinking about the limits to collaboration that may arise from differing interpretations of professional responsibility.

Theoretical Frameworks

Overall, four lines of research inform this study: learning from experience, focus groups as a data source, teacher knowledge, and collaborative inquiry. The most distinctive feature of the restructured program is the extended practicum of 14 weeks, beginning in the fall term. During this period, teacher candidates are assigned to associate schools where they complete two field-based courses, in addition to gaining classroom teaching experience. This approach to teacher education emphasizes learning in and from experience and is congruent with Dewey (1938), Schön (1983), and Lave & Wenger (1991). Fenstermacher (1992) has argued, from an intensive program of research and theory development, for greater field experience before formal course work and for integrating educational theory with classroom experience. Evidence of the value of this approach is also available in Munby and Russell's (1994) development of the authority of experience.

The focus group interview refers to interviewing a purposefully sampled group of people rather than each person individually. Because group members are stimulated by the ideas of one another, a researcher can increase the quality and richness of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Although focus groups are an effective means of soliciting teachers' and administrators' understandings, experiences, and perspectives on a topic of interest--like a new teacher education program (Morgan, 1988)--they were used little in educational research until recently. Increasingly, focus group methodology is being used to explore beliefs, values, and perspectives on issues such

as curriculum review (Hendershott & Wright, 1993), the effectiveness of education (Lederman, 1990), and the assessment of student affairs programs and services (Kaase & Harshbarger, 1993). Singular to this method is the level of intimate conveyance of data (Byers & Wilcox, 1991). The candor and clarity of the responses of the teachers and administrators reported in this study reflect Krueger's (1988) observation that "the intent of focus groups is not to infer but to understand, not to generalize but to determine the range, and not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people perceive a situation" (p. 96).

Kessels and Korthagen (1996) provide a conceptual base for understanding the relationship between theory and practice in teacher knowledge and argue for a re-evaluation of practical knowledge. Katz and Raths (1985) have described the divide separating teacher educators and field practitioners. Bridging this gap demands respect for the cultures that inform practice while working to develop practical inquiry (Richardson, 1996) and interactive research (Huberman, 1993) that allows for effective transfer of knowledge. Darling-Hammond (1996) likewise argues for building new partnerships between research and practice where co-constructing meaning honours the "importance of multiple perspectives and the fragility of practice" (p.14).

Traditional relationships between schools and university faculties are hierarchical (White, Deegan, & Allexsaht-Snider, 1997), with the university holding a privileged position relative to schools (Laine, Schultz, & Smith, 1994; Lewison & Holliday, 1997; Little, 1993). Little (1993) points to "long-standing asymmetries in status, power, and resources" (p. 9). Graham's (1998) work collaborating with high school English teachers redesigning a teacher education program in secondary language arts describes the teachers' initial view of "researchers as people who isolated themselves in universities, knew little and cared less about classroom complexities, but nonetheless

passed down theories for practitioners to implement" (p. 255). Obstacles to collaboration for teacher participants included avoiding burn out, easing transitions for mentoring teachers who needed to cycle out of that role, and varying levels of commitment to self-critique. Other obstacles were recognition of the resources required including time, talk, and energy from mentoring teachers, and sharing leadership roles with university educators. Obstacles for university participants were tied to systemic pressures to do research and publish. Collaboration was often undervalued, "frequency of collaborative work...does not mean that it is as highly valued as individual work in academe" (Hafernik, Messerschmitt, & Vandrick, 1997, p. 32). Academic productivity for more junior faculty members might not translate into school collaborations. Another obstacle for university faculty was their credibility within the schools. Pointing to the need for a systemic reevaluation of the relationships between the university and the schools, Graham argues that "colleges of education must not underestimate the demands of the role and the wisdom of sustained relationships with school colleagues. They must also recognize that the results justify the efforts" (p. 264).

Lewison and Holliday (1997) describe a successful collaboration focusing on professional development that took place between a principal and the teachers of a very traditional elementary school and a university graduate student. Teachers determined the focus of a study group, teaching writing to elementary students, and negotiated how the group would be run. To develop and sustain the partnership, four variables were critical: (1) equalizing positions of power giving teachers control of monthly study group meetings; (2) building trust at an early stage (six months prior to start-up) with the principal, with weekly contacts about project design and identification of important issues; (3) developing relationships with individual teachers in an hour interview before

the regular study group meetings began; and (4) ongoing, frequent, and varied communication (e.g. phone conversations, dialogue journal writing, publishing journals, study group discussions, and fax journaling).

Given the body of literature (e.g. Conant, 1963; Ganser, 1996; Ganser & Wham, 1998; McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996; Watts, 1987) that supports the value of practicum experiences for teacher candidates, Hamlin (1997) questions why minimal effort is made by teacher preparation institutions to ensure that candidates continue to be welcome in schools. With the increasing pressures on teachers to meet the complex needs of their pupils, she asks whether administrators find it in the best interests of their schools to have their teachers additionally burdened by mentoring student teachers. Yet, crediting the importance of the student teaching component, Hamlin argues that it has to be protected by benefits greater than minimal stipends and teachers' sense of professional obligation. Teacher preparation institutions may have to demonstrate to school administrators how partnerships between universities and schools will strengthen and enrich the teaching in their schools.

The critical role that cooperating teachers play and the influence they have on teacher candidates is well acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Calderhead, 1988; Joyce, 1988; Seperson & Joyce, 1973). Ironically, relatively little attention has been paid to the voices of cooperating teachers in describing the impact of that role (Tannehill, 1989). Addressing this, Ganser and Wham (1998) report the results of survey data from 454 cooperating teachers, spanning preschool through high school. Overall, their respondents valued the professional contribution that they were making to individual candidates and to the profession itself and expressed high levels of personal satisfaction in their role. Studies by Koerner (1992) and Duquette

(1994) of cooperating teachers likewise cited professional satisfaction and opportunities to reexamine their practice as positive benefits. However, there were also areas of concern. Koerner reports as problematic the interruption of instruction, displacement of the teacher from her central position in the classroom, disruption of classroom routine, breaking the isolation of the classroom teacher, and demands of time and energy. Similarly, Duquette's respondents cited the heavy time commitment as stressful and found the skill development of some of the student teachers disappointing.

> Cole (1997) argues strongly that teacher researchers have poorly served classroom teachers:
>
> Teachers have 'given' the research community so much in terms of knowledge and understanding about what it means to teach; what have we given teachers in return? How has it come to pass that engagement in ongoing learning and growth through reflection--what might be considered a natural professional impulse--has become, perhaps has always been, a marginal activity for most teachers? And what is our collective responsibility, as educators and researchers, to do something about it? (p. 22)

She contends that researchers need to redefine the focus and agenda of their work, shifting from how teachers think about their work, or why they need to, to consider how it could be made possible for them to do so. "Despite the movement to more alternative site-based, collaborative inquiry, researchers have not made many ovations toward action and change" (p. 22). Cole recommends a change in the research role where researchers would act as advocates for teachers and attend to the educational contexts that would truly support teachers' learning and reflective practice, where research and action would be explicitly linked.

In summary, most authors imply university researchers have usually sought collaborative relationships with teachers to advance their own agendas of teacher education and research. Cole (1997) advises reversing the usual so that university researchers seek collaborative relationships to teachers to advance teachers' agendas. To foreshadow, our study considers the possibility that, in order to collaborate, each community must advance its own agenda and priorities.

Methods and Data Sources

In this section, we describe conducting three sets of focus groups. The third set of focus groups were supplemented by interviews with 31 teachers.

In the initial consultative set of three focus groups (one consisting of elementary teachers, one of secondary teachers, and one of administrators from both elementary and secondary schools), a neutral facilitator from another unit in the university moderated the sessions. Two recorders took detailed notes. Although our first pass through the data showed consistency and complementarity between the two accounts, the notetakers recommended audiotaping future focus groups. The second pass through the data showed similar responses from the three groups to the four substantive questions, each concentrating on one aspect of the restructured program. However, the administrators focused more on the intersection of the proposed model for teacher education with the operation of under-funded schools. The third pass looked for emerging themes from the responses. (For more detail, see Martin, Hutchinson, & Whitehead, 1999).

In the evaluative set of focus groups during the pilot year, five focus groups were conducted with the field, including three groups of elementary teachers, secondary teachers, and elementary and secondary administrators from the area close to the university. Two groups were held in a metropolitan area, the location of a number of associate schools. Each consisted of teachers and an

administrator, with one focus group representing elementary schools and the other secondary schools. Six questions were asked, each devoted to one feature of the restructured program. The transcriptions were analyzed in three passes using methods of constant comparison. On the first pass, the transcripts were analyzed for emerging themes on each question. On the second pass, the analysis was directed at comparing the five focus groups, and consistencies and inconsistencies were identified. The third pass involved comparing the themes from the first and second sets of focus groups, so that congruences and divergences could be revealed. (For more detail, see Martin, Munby, & Hutchinson, 1998).

In the evaluative set of focus groups during the first year of full implementation of the restructured program, four focus groups were conducted with the field, including one group of elementary teachers, one group of elementary administrators, and two groups of secondary teachers and administrators. The participants were from the nearby area because distance did not appear to be a variable given the similarity in responses among in-town and out-of-town respondents in the previous evaluative set. Six questions were asked about particular aspects of the program, as in the pilot year. Analysis followed the constant comparative method using the frameworks developed in the earlier studies described above with close attention paid to predictive validity based on the previous data sets. We sought themes that ran across the responses to the questions and expressed the views of the field on the restructured program as a whole. However, four passes were made through the data. Three passes followed the sequence described above, while the fourth looked at congruences and divergences among all the data and the themes from the perspectives of the field and of the Faculty of Education.

One of our colleagues (Freeman, 1998) also interviewed 31 secondary teachers individually

from two secondary schools located near the university. We have included references to his findings as well as our focus groups, due to the similarity of his major themes to our focus group data. He had not read any of our papers before collecting and analyzing his interview data. (For more detail, see Freeman, 1998).

Results

Themes from the Consultative Focus Groups

The initial consultative focus groups presented mixed data. On the one hand, there were expressions of protest for the amount of time the practicum would demand of teachers in associate schools and for the limited preparation the candidates would receive at the Faculty of Education. On the other hand, the venture was met with praise for the extended practicum and for the intended close contact of faculty with teacher candidates during the practicum. Importantly, the consultative focus groups provided the Faculty of Education with detailed suggestions and clear predictions about the problems to be anticipated.

Three themes emerged as criteria for making the necessary relationships between the associate schools and the Faculty of Education viable. These themes were partnership, pragmatics, and problematics. Partnership was seen as highly desirable but challenging to attain. The infusion of young energetic teacher candidates into schools was valued, and extended practica were viewed as a better way to educate teachers and as better for schools than the previous model of 2-3 week teaching rounds spread over the academic year. As one administrator said, "teaching is a marathon" and being "a sprint runner for a couple of weeks" does not prepare candidates well for the marathon (Martin, Hutchinson, & Whitehead, 1999). The message was clear that teaching experience for candidates must resemble teaching as it is experienced by those in the profession. However,

successful partnerships required faculty members to maintain close relationships with the school and to talk regularly with teachers and administrators about the field-based program. Pragmatics provided the Faculty with a work list that included joint planning and negotiation and clear articulation of roles and responsibilities. Problematics predicted disappointing outcomes if partnership and pragmatics were not attended to closely. Without keen attention to implementation issues--teacher and faculty member commitment, clear statements of gradually increasing responsibilities for candidates, workloads of associate teachers, and in-school coordination--many problems would surface.

Themes from the Evaluative Focus Groups during the Pilot Year

The first evaluative focus groups, from the pilot year, provided rich accounts of the problems experienced and the problem solving initiated by the field. These were variations on the problems predicted by the consultative focus groups, with variations depending on many things including the way individual faculty members had understood and communicated specific aspects of the program. The similarity in problems appeared despite the use of quite different samples and sampling techniques from the first to second year. The themes of partnership, pragmatics, and proposals emerged from these focus groups.

Partnership. Partnership centred on the benefits of reciprocal interactions between and among all of the players; namely, teachers, teacher candidates, students in classrooms, administrators, and members of the Faculty of Education. The requirements necessary to sustain and support the partnership were described and were more detailed than in the consultative focus groups. Although there was support for the integration of candidates into the life of the school, these evaluative focus groups were less wholehearted in their endorsement of opportunities for

candidates' sharing ideas and teachers' reflecting on practice than the consultative groups. The candidates' lack of background knowledge about teaching was a source of concern: "We felt that they had so far to come, and we were dragging them along" (elementary teacher). A secondary administrator summarized the flavour of the concerns, "The whole thing was a great plus to candidates, a plus to the school as a whole. It wasn't a plus to the individual associate teachers" (Martin, Hutchinson, & Munby, 1998).

There was general agreement that the professional growth of teacher candidates was supported by the extended practica with its emphasis on learning from experience. Partnerships between teachers and candidates were promoted by the associate school model that allowed candidates to become more heavily immersed in the life of the school. However partnerships between the schools and the Faculty of Education were less satisfactory. These evaluative focus groups were vocal in their protest when partnership arrangements left them feeling jilted because faculty liaisons were absent or infrequently seen or heard.

Pragmatics. Pragmatics was tied to the particular and practical aspects of implementing the field-based program. These included preparatory activities, opening day and opening week of school, coordinating the associate school model, and organization of the field-based courses. When candidates had visited their associate schools prior to the beginning of the school year, there was praise, "a real eye-opener," "important to...see what people do, frantically, before school begins." Without these visits, there was added pressure for the teachers of meeting "someone new who's going to be in your classroom, and meeting new 20 children and meeting 20 sets of parents at the same time" (elementary teacher). This set of evaluative focus groups reported overwhelmingly positive feedback from their teacher candidates about the importance of being in the schools on

opening day and seeing "the growth in kids from day to day" and "how you actually set that classroom into motion." Less positive were the teachers. Some elementary teachers "were uncertain...about what was expected of them." Secondary teachers were less enthusiastic. Adding a candidate to the mix of many students in many classes felt like overload for some.

The logistics of pairing teacher candidates and associate teachers within an associate school was more difficult in secondary schools than in elementary schools, as predicted by the consultative focus groups. The varying expectations and "lack of clarity" about when candidates should assume teaching responsibilities was a frustration for the evaluative groups. The consultative focus groups had forecasted a series of steps including joint planning prior to the beginning of school, candidate observation during school start-up, joint teaching by the candidate and associate teacher, followed by an extended teaching opportunity. The absence of guidelines like these was trying. The predictions of the consultative groups about assessment of teacher candidates were heard in the unanimous dissatisfaction expressed by the evaluative groups about unclear criteria that included details such as format for evaluation, timing, and who should evaluate. Regarding the field-based courses, the consultative focus groups had suggestions for content of these courses but few recommendations for their organization. But in the evaluative focus groups, organizational issues were highlighted, centring on scheduling and demands made on both teacher candidates and school staff.

Proposals. The third theme, proposals, contained recommendations for tackling problems described in pragmatics. The logistics of organizing the extended practicum made implementation problematic. Suggestions about communication and recognition were intended to improve the outcomes. These reinforced the overriding message of the consultative focus groups that

partnership was possible but daunting to achieve.

Critical was the need for continuous and open communication between the associate schools and the Faculty of Education. More direction was requested from the Faculty about what associate teachers' professional responsibilites to candidates and to the associate school model entailed. A designated coordinator or mentor could improve in-school coordination. Closer ties and readier access to the faculty liaison were imperative. The liaison was seen as a touchstone to ensure that teachers and administrators were meeting the Faculty's expectations and delivering on their own commitment to the candidates, "I wanted to make the Pilot Project work for them." The data suggested that the field did not ask enough questions of the Faculty prior to implementation. On the other hand, the Faculty did not know which questions to ask of the field.

The assumptions made by the field about what the candidates would bring with them to the schools in the way of knowledge and experience underscored the need for more effective communication. Based on previous experience with the former programs, teachers had assumed that candidates would have some knowledge of "lesson plans, classroom management, and motivational techniques." Many teachers found that they "were really running to teach...all the pedagogical skills that [candidates] need to perform in the classroom, and that took an immense amount of time and effort." Proposed were alterations to "the time frame." For example, candidates could be at the schools for the start-up in September, return to the Faculty of Education to learn "the groundwork," and then go back to the schools. Although candidates returned to the Faculty for the on-campus weeks, these did not appear to meet the needs of the field, in part because they encroached on the life and rhythms of the school.

Overall, the field wanted more recognition from the Faculty of Education for their significant efforts to implement the extended practicum. Suggested was remuneration like the honoraria that used to be given to associate teachers. There was support for professional development opportunities that occured at the schools, but requests that the demands of the school schedule be acknowledged, when "you go from 4 to 7 after school, and you're so tired out you don't get anything out of it." Both teachers and principals thought that faculty members did not adequately understand the workload demands on professionals in associate schools, "I felt like I gave a lot more than I got back." Questions were raised about what faculty members were doing while teacher candidates were on their extended practicum. Faculty members needed to recognize the contribution of the field and to communicate better the full range of their workload responsibilities.

Themes from the Evaluative Focus Groups during the First Year of Implementation

In the third set of focus groups, from the first year of full implementation of the restructured program, we heard outspoken protest and tempered praise and saw the predictive power and predictive validity of focus groups for increasingly understanding the field's perspective. In the third pass through the data, three themes emerged: partnership, pragmatics, and perspectives. Partnership focused on reciprocal interactions among all the stakeholders, pragmatics involved the mechanics of implementing an extended practicum, and perspectives reflected how the field saw their role which embedded their recommendations.

We then reviewed all the data and the themes from the three sets of focus groups, considering, as well, the demonstrated predictive validity. Looking at the cumulative data and the results through a broader lens, two overriding issues presented: views of the purpose of the

practicum and professional responsibilities. We realized that understanding these principal issues was contingent on understanding the differences between the culture of the school and the culture of the university and the ways in which practice was situated.

Partnership. As in the previous sets of focus groups, the benefits of reciprocal interactions were highlighted. The presence of teacher candidates in the schools was energizing: they "got involved right from the very beginning in extracurricular kinds of things....that increased their visibility as well" (elementary teacher). An elementary administrator detailed how one candidate "ran the entire Christmas concert;" another took over some of the gym classes and "taught the teachers a few things;" and others "ran lunchtime programs." The candidates were seen as doing things for the schools that "we would not have been able to offer and have had up and running at the beginning of the year," like a soccer program, "and [our] kids cashed in, big time." Tempering this enthusiasm were concerns about what the candidates did not bring with them, "They were really green;" "it was like filling an empty vessel! You had to teach them everything" (elementary teachers). Secondary teachers were equally pointed in their criticisms: "When they come in here, they're not really prepared to handle a class;" "they had no introduction to teaching at all."

Closer relationships between the schools and the Faculty of Education continued to be seen as desirable but not always forthcoming. Once again the faculty liaison was considered the linchpin, "we need to see them more....they need to see their candidates' teaching. There needs to be more discussion with the associates." When the liaison was highly visible and approachable, there was praise: "contact continuing through the semester was very helpful, and a valuable change;" "good backup for the program;" "the best part of the program is the faculty liaison [being] available to meet with the teacher candidates, to meet with the associate teachers on an ongoing basis

throughout a practicum" (secondary teachers).

As in the previous focus groups, the field was generally positive about the professional growth of candidates over the course of the extended practicum. Secondary teachers praised the opportunity that candidates had to become familiar with "day-to-day school life...and what's involved in being a teacher." The praise was tempered by concerns that the length of the practicum could be too long if a candidate were weak; then "you could be in for a really hard time," and "a torturous experience." Elementary teachers also found that the "professional growth was just tremendous." However there was spirited explication that followed, based on the field's view that candidates had to be taught about teaching: "it was if they were empty jars in September, and we taught them so much about basic classroom management skills, organizational skills, basic teaching skills, that I think should have been covered [at the Faculty of Education]. We did all the teaching!" More wholehearted in her praise was the elementary administrator who enthused,

> their professional growth was incredible! They went from being very quiet and just supportive and behind everybody--being the last in line, making sure the kids all came in from recess, to standing in front of the class, and they [candidates] literally ran the whole day. And they had to give out some disciplinary measures. And they had to greet parents. And they had to do their marking. And they had to do their planning and organizing with the teacher, and then the teacher would just let them go.

The consultative focus groups had predicted that the associate school model would contribute to closer partnerships between the schools and the Faculty of Education. Both sets of evaluative focus groups supported the model because it provided candidates with opportunities to

become more immersed in the life of the school from the outset. Because they [candidates] "belong to a school and not just a classroom, everybody gets to know them" and they get "to know the personalities of the teachers, their skills, how they taught, one different style in a different classroom, their discipline styles, and how each classroom is a world unto itself in many different ways" (elementary administrator).

Where the optimism of the consultative focus groups was not borne out was in the field's perception that the Faculty of Education did not adequately support partnership. Many teachers requested more professional development experiences including in-services and invitations to events such as speakers and workshops at the Faculty. Others were less certain that this would be sufficient. The pointed statement of a secondary teacher represented an often-heard view, "I'm not sure that PD seminars would really make me feel much better" because "I felt that the whole of the instructional load rested on the shoulders of the teachers in the schools."

Pragmatics. The particular and practical aspects of implementing the field-based program drew the least praise and the most protest from the field. There was remarkable convergence in the data between both sets of evaluative focus groups about the mechanics of implementing an extended practica. Where there was divergence was in details of implementation for elementary and secondary teachers. These differences reflected the organizational and structural disparities between elementary schools and high schools. The mechanics of implementation included: preparatory activities prior to the beginning of school, opening day and opening week, in-school coordination, and accommodating the field-based courses.

When candidates were able to go to their associate schools before the first day of school, meet with their associate teachers, assist with classroom set-up, and be included in staff meetings,

they were more readily assimilated into the culture of the school, "they were part of the staff." (Participating in these types of preparatory activites was not an option for many candidates at the secondary schools. At that time, the political climate within the secondary schools was unsettled due to provincially mandated changes to teaching load.) Adding an unknown teacher candidate to the mix of "20-25 kids and their parents...makes for a real stressful day" (elementary teacher).

Most elementary teachers and administrators saw the value in candidates being present during the opening day and opening week of school because "It gives them a more realistic picture of what they will have to do when they actually get down to a teaching position;" "They see...the zillion jobs that have to be done." Important, too, was candidates' gaining a sense of continuity: "They've seen the growth in the classroom, in the children, in the routines...they have to see the beginning so they can understand the rest of the process." The secondary teachers offerred mixed reviews. Some saw benefits, "the best way to learn is to experience first hand, an excellent way of learning how to teach, whether they want to teach, whether they can teach." Others strongly disagreed, "I firmly believe that the program begins two weeks too soon;" "It's too hectic" for both the teacher and the teacher candidate.

As in the earlier set of evaluative focus groups, the need for in-school coordination was underscored. However in this set of focus groups, coordination became a part of pragmatics because teachers were not sure what to do when problems arose like a candidate being asked to teach full days on her fourth day at the school, what to do with a weaker candidate, what to do if an associate and candidate did not mesh. Often mentioned was candidates' misperceiving their role and assuming they were ready to teach when, in fact, they were not, and bristling at being asked to work one-on-one with students.

The field-based courses continued to be seen as an intrusion on the life of the schools. Because they took candidates away from the classrooms, because the practitioners thought that the purpose of the extended practicum was to give candidates exposure to the schools and to the realities of teaching, they were an infringement: they "took a lot of time away from the class [and] a lot of energy...very frustrating." Many were concerned that it was too demanding and unrealistic on the part of the Faculty of Education to expect candidates to complete work that was considered separate from, if not irrelevant to, in-school work. There was general uncertainty as to the purpose of the field-based courses and even of the on-campus weeks. Scheduling common time for candidates to work on these courses was logistically difficult in the elementary schools and more so in the high schools. Many elementary and secondary teachers thought it was adding insult to injury when candidates did not appear to be using that common meeting time productively.

Perspectives. Perspectives reflected how the field saw their role and how they embedded their concerns and recommendations. Teachers felt torn by their responsibilities to their own students and to their candidates, yet, necessarily, placed their own students first, "as associate teachers our first priority has to be the students that are in front of us." This perspective shaped their concerns that their students could be compromised by a weaker candidate. Additionally if there were not a good match between associate and candidate, "you can be in for a really hard time."

Practitioners wanted explicit guidelines clearly laying out criteria for selecting associate teachers, criteria for appraising the performance of an associate teacher, criteria for pairing candidates and associates, and criteria for evaluating candidates. They also wanted guidelines that laid out what the Faculty of Education expected of them, "I don't know what the Faculty wants us to do," including a plan that sequenced candidates' gradual assumption of teaching responsibilities.

The Practicum Handbook that was distributed by the Faculty to all associate teachers and candidates and that was intended to provide these types of guidelines was considered inadequate. Because the field took their responsibilities so seriously, they asked for more elaborated guidelines. Because the field saw themselves as professionals, they expected professional conduct from candidates and were deeply disturbed when they were disappointed and frustrated when they did not know what the Faculty expected them to do.

The perception that candidates came to the schools as "empty vessels" needing to be filled again reflected the field's concern about their role. This translated into something of a double-edged sword as time devoted to teaching candidates about teaching was time taken away from their own planning, preparation, and teaching. Although the teachers were strongly committed to "giving something back" to the profession by "helping future teachers," they, in turn, wanted "something back" in return for the demands on their time and energy. A secondary teacher logged the time spent with a teacher candidate, "6-8 hours a week just discussing lessons. That's a work day, and I can't afford to have another work day placed in my week." The seeming lack of recognition by the Faculty of the teachers' significant efforts felt like an affront.

The current climate demands increasing accountability from teachers for their students' learning. Additionally, teachers are accountable to parents, administration, and the public at large. Taking on the role of associate teacher makes teachers feel similarly accountable for their teacher candidates and, by extension, accountable to the Faculty of Education. At a time when more is demanded of teachers, the need for recognition becomes greater. A secondary teacher summed this up well,

We are doing a lot of work that is not really recognized in a way which we feel is perhaps

proportionate to the effort, or at least appropriate. This comes at a time when we're feeling pretty beaten up. We're beaten up, and we're beaten down. It is unfortunate that this new project coincided with such a difficult year politically when we felt beleaguered.

For the most part, field practitioners did not perceive implementing the extended practicum as a collaborative enterprise.

Discussion

To contextualize our findings, it became important to consider the respective communities of practice collaborating in teacher education and the two cultures they represented. These were identified by a secondary principal, a participant in the first set of evaluative groups, as "the ivory tower and the practical tower," each with its own texture, each relatively far from the other. The words of this participant brought to the attention of the research group the different perspectives and responsibilities of the collaborators. We asked ourselves, "What are we learning from experience, by carrying out these focus groups, about how to improve the program for everyone involved?" One thing we heard was that the field wanted the faculty to function more like them, spending considerable amounts of time in schools and in classrooms. We realized that while more time in associate schools might improve the program, this would not be a viable solution for all concerned. Another message from the field was that they believed the faculty wanted them to function more like the faculty, spending considerable time listening to and talking with teacher candidates. They felt this was not viable, either.

The practitioners were emphasizing in their focus group conversations that their first commitment was to the learning of the children and adolescents in their classrooms, followed by their commitment to the profession and to those who are becoming teachers. However, as teacher

educators, our priorities were the reverse of theirs. This led us to ask, "What are the limits to collaboration, given the vested interests and professional identities of the stakeholders?"

Painting a picture of the two communities of practice requires a broadstroke that represents two issues: contrasting views of the purpose of the practicum and configuring professional responsibilities. The Practicum Handbook, June 1998-June 1999, A Guide for Associate Teachers, Teacher Candidates, Placement Hosts and Faculty states that the overall intent of the program is to foster "learning from experience and the intent has been, and continues to be, that Teacher Candidates regard their teacher education year as their first year as an ongoing professional and not as their last as a University student. The concept of appropriate professional growth and development underlies many of the program activities" (p. 2). The thrust of the program is learning from experience and ensuring that candidates will become professionals who will continue to grow, think critically and reflectively, and support their students' learning equitably and responsively throughout their teaching careers.

During the restructuring process for the current program, we continually asked, "What kind of teachers do we want our teacher candidates to be?" The mission statement speaks to this: "The mission of the Faculty of Education is to contribute substantively and professionally, through teaching and research, to the development of knowledgeable and caring educators who are responsive to the needs of their students and of contemporary society" (Faculty of Education, Pre-Service Program Documentation, 1998, p. 17).

Our next question was, "How will we ensure that the program makes this happen?" For us as teacher educators the extended practicum is an integral component in the learning-to-teach process. But it is one component among several that include field-based courses, two weeks of

intense on-campus coursework during the practicum, curriculum and educational studies courses during the winter term, a program focus course that allows candidates to concentrate on a broad topic of interest, e.g. exceptional children, and to develop a professional portfolio, and an alternative practicum that may take place in a setting related to the program focus that is not in a school. For us, all of these components are important and integrated, necessarily. For the field, the practicum is important and exclusive, necessarily.

The culture of the school requires that teachers go to school to teach. Therefore practitioners expect teacher candidates to be in the school to teach in order to learn. The culture of the university requires learning. Therefore we expect teacher candidates to be in the school to learn in order to teach. These differing viewpoints of the purpose of the practicum help to situate the tempered praise and outspoken protest that we have heard.

Understanding the limits to collaboration requires acknowledging the assumptions that each partner makes. The field assumed that we would send them candidates who were prepared to teach. We assumed that the field understood that we would send them candidates who were prepared to learn. The field assumed that if candidates were in the school longer, we would be more immediately involved. We assumed that the field would understand the configuration of the practicum. This meant staggered on-campus weeks where we could be teaching for three two-week sets or 6 weeks. The field assumed that if candidates were in the schools their commitment would be to the schools and the children. Allowing candidates time to work on field-based courses took them away from the classroom. We assumed that the field would understand the premise of the program, learning from experience, and would regard the candidates' common meeting time as an opportunity for them to build on their classroom experiences and consider critical issues such as

equity and inclusion that would frame their teaching. We assumed that the field would understand that our commitments extend beyond the preservice program and include research agendas that are part of the university culture. The field assumed that we had a singular focus—the B.Ed. program. These assumptions mirror the fundamentally different views that field practitioners and teacher educators hold about their professional responsibilities.

How the practicum is viewed and how professional responsibilities are understood and carried out speaks to the two communities of practice and the cultures they represent. Webb and Palincsar (1996) describe the essence of collaboration as "convergence--the construction of shared meanings for conversations, concepts, and experiences" (p. 848). This is a tall order and entails negotiation to come to agreement about shared meanings. Both the university and the school are about teaching and learning. How these responsibilities are considered and enacted are very different. This is where we encountered the limits to collaboration. It is certainly possible that we did not ask the right questions in our focus group conversations. Calderhead (1993) suggests that:

> the relationship between research and practice in teacher education has tended in the past to be characterized by fairly insular conceptions of both research and practice and a tendency to view research purely as a means of supporting and informing practice rather than in terms of a reciprocal questioning and exploration. (p. 17)

It is also possible that we have not encouraged sufficient reciprocal questioning and exploration as the restructuring has proceeded. Although we did not achieve convergence, the process of collaboration has taught us that there is a fundamental and, we believe, healthy tension about the fact that teacher educators and teachers in the field have very different jobs.

Conclusion

For collaboration to have any kind of meaning, we had to do more than forget the protest and accept the praise. If more than lipservice was to be paid to collaboration, the onus was clearly on us to respond to the assessment that we requested from the field. The initial, consultative set of focus groups showed us that the field valued partnerships with the Faculty of Education. They provided us with a pragmatic work list, and anticipated what would be problematic if partnership and pragmatics were not dealt with thoroughly. Our findings were used to guide the preparation of the first Practicum Handbook intended to assist teachers and administrators in their roles in the restructured program. The results were also used in planning the methods of delivery and content of the two field-based courses and other specific components, such as the role of the faculty liaison.

The evaluative set of focus groups during the pilot year validated the findings from the consultative groups. These groups told us that partnership continued to be desired but harder to achieve than we had anticipated, that pragmatics of implementation placed enormous demands on teachers, and that more attention to communication, coordination, and recognition was imperative. We revisited the role of the faculty liaison and particulars like the number of visits to schools and reconsidered honoraria to associate schools. The subsequent evaluative groups showed us that we appeared to give insufficient credence to their concerns. Even when a faculty liaison was highly visible and appropriate, teachers felt overburdened and undervalued.

The Practicum Handbook has since been substantially revised to include: the Mission of the Faculty of Education, Program Design, and Roles and Responsibilities of Associate Teachers, School Liaisons, Faculty Liaisons, and Teacher Candidates. It provides Guidelines for Teaching Responsibilities in a Secondary School and in an Elementary School, Guidelines for Assessment

along with sample forms, and outlines how to proceed with Teacher Candidates in Difficulty. We have reconfigured the structure and delivery of the program for the coming year, 1999-2000, and candidates will spend the first four weeks of the fall term on campus before going into the schools. We continue to learn from experience and from the experiences of our teacher candidates and the field.

Despite the vocal protest and tempered praise, despite the less than total enthusiasm for the restructured program from the field and from some faculty, despite the limits to collaboration that we have encountered, despite the dichotomies between the two communities of practice, we continue to ask our initial question: Can we afford not to take the risk that we might educate better teachers? We think not.

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